

Mad Libling Station

1952



2004

A Legacy of Excellence

Bad Aibling Station: A Legacy of Excellence

**Text by Dr. John Schindler
Cover Art, Photograph Research and Captions
by Cathi Pettersen**

**Countless men and women faithfully supported
Bad Aibling Station over the years –
its mission, its community, its legacy.
This booklet is dedicated to them.**

Bad Aibling Station: Remembering the Legacy

Introduction

The year 2004 brings the closure of Bad Aibling Station, a major U.S. Department of Defense communications facility that for over a half-century has served the cause of freedom and enhanced the security of the United States and its allies. The closure of “BA,” predicted practically since the establishment of Field Station Bad Aibling by the U.S. Army in 1952, has finally arrived. As the Station shuts its doors, it brings an end to fifty-two years of distinguished service to the nation and NATO by the thousands of U.S. military and civilian personnel who worked at Bad Aibling over the decades. But the Station’s legacy of dedication to freedom and international security will live on at other U.S. facilities in Europe and around the world, and in the hearts of the many Americans and Germans who worked and lived side by side at BA.

This brochure outlines the diverse history of Bad Aibling Station from its establishment at the dawn of the Cold War to its closure in the post-9/11 era. It includes many photographs and stories to capture the flavor of life at BA over the decades, recording the history of the Station in image and anecdote. This work is a slice of a rich and varied life, and it aims to remind those who served at Bad Aibling in any capacity – military or civilian, of all ranks, races,

and backgrounds – of their contributions to the security of the U.S. and NATO, and to continue their honored legacy.

The Early Years

The establishment of Field Station Bad Aibling in 1952 is where our story officially begins. But this was hardly the beginning of BA’s history, as every newcomer was quick to learn. The town’s first documentary appearance came in 804 A.D., as Epilinga, a name which over centuries evolved into the current Aibling (the designation Bad – meaning “spa” – was granted over a millennium later, in 1895). Yet Upper Bavaria, *Oberbayern* to the locals, was settled two thousand years ago, during the Roman period. Roman troops constructed aqueducts, bridges and roads throughout what is now known as *Oberbayern* to protect vital lines of communications on the unstable frontier with



The Station and Mietraching

Celts and Germanic tribes, though few ruins survive today.

In 1272 Aibling was granted to the dukes of Wittelsbach, the royal family that would rule Bavaria in unbroken succession until 1918. Yet this political stability did not translate into peace for Aibling. The Middle Ages brought wars and tumult to *Oberbayern*, and the early modern period was worse: the Thirty Years War and the disease and plunder that accompanied it killed most of the town's population (two-thirds were felled by the plague alone). In addition, between the 15th and 19th centuries, Aibling was destroyed by fire five times.

But the establishment of Bavaria's first mud-bath resort at Aibling in 1844 promised a brighter future, and the town's prosperity rose gradually as *Kurort* Bad Aibling became a well-known resort where Germans and people from many European countries came to "take the cure" in the mud baths, which were believed to ameliorate symptoms of rheumatism, arthritis, and other conditions.

Sustained economic development of a different kind came in the mid-1930s with the establishment of a major airbase at Bad Aibling by Hitler's *Luftwaffe*. The rearmament program included the establishment of an air force with a network of bases across Germany. The *Luftwaffe* chose the farm fields near Mietraching, a village outside Bad Aibling, as the site of a new fighter base near the Austrian border, and construction began in mid-1936. Mietraching is nearly as ancient as Aibling, possessing the oldest Gothic village church in the region, dating to 1315, and the *Luftwaffe's* arrival was not the first time soldiers came to the area – Mietraching's fields had hosted Swedish encampments during their 1640s occupation in the Thirty Years War – nor would it be the last.

Fliegerhorst Bad Aibling, while a headache for the farmers of Mietraching, was an economic boon to the region, the five-year construction project employing 3,000 workers. Although the base wasn't completed until spring 1941, the first *Luftwaffe* units arrived in spring 1937, when Fighter Group 1/135 came with Heinkel-51 biplanes and a thousand men; these were soon replaced with three



Luftwaffe roll call in what later became known as "The Quad" (1939)

squadrons of modern Messerschmidt fighters, the Me-109. Industry Minister Albert Speer and other senior officials visited the base, but – contrary to Station lore – Hitler never came to the *Fliegerhorst*.

of fighting did Allied aircraft strike, destroying many Me-109s in April 1945; the *Luftwaffe* disabled and demolished most of the rest a few weeks later, just before the U.S. Army arrived in Bad Aibling on the night of May 1, 1945, the first official American presence in the town.



Antiaircraft gun on what later became the Engineering Building, overlooking the airfield later known as Pumpkin Park (1939)

Fighters from *Fliegerhorst* Bad Aibling supported the 1938 occupations of Austria and the Sudetenland, but its future as a combat base was limited, as newer, larger fighters proved too heavy for the airfield. When the Me-109s and their 3,000 personnel left Bad Aibling in August 1939, they were replaced by training squadrons.

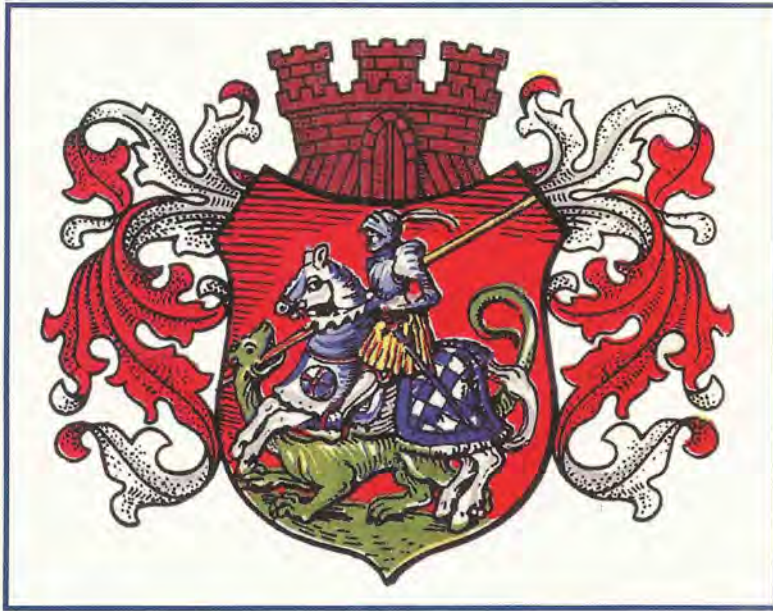
For most of the war, the base was a training depot for ground attack units flying the Junkers-87 Stuka, and for radio operators. In the last year of the war, the *Fliegerhorst* trained pilots for Me-109 squadrons, but Bad Aibling was never a combat base. As a result, the war barely touched the town directly. Only in the last months

Luftwaffe formation in front of what became the power plant (1939)



American tanks rolled into Bad Aibling around 8:30 p.m., and the town surrendered ninety minutes later; U.S. forces took over the airbase on May 4. The Americans were advancing rapidly in the last days of the Third Reich. The troops who occupied Bad Aibling were moving northward from Italy over the Alps through Austria, rounding up German prisoners along the way. The abandoned airbase thus quickly found a new mission.

The area was teeming with POWs of all ages – many were teenagers and old men pressed into service in the last months of the war – and all were hungry and in need of food and shelter. The Americans wasted no time, converting the *Fliegerhorst* into a POW camp within days of their arrival. After Nazi capitulation on May 8, Bad Aibling almost overnight found itself the largest POW camp in the region.



Bad Aibling logo

The Americans and the town were overwhelmed by the numbers of POWs, arriving at the rate of over a thousand a day, and the improvised camp was quickly overcrowded. At its peak, Bad Aibling housed 84,000 prisoners and, while the Americans and townsfolk did their best to provide food and shelter, the POW experience was grim during the initial postwar months. Fortunately, conditions gradually improved, thanks to relief provided by neighboring towns, and by the time most POWs were released in 1946, the region was employing prisoners to repair war damage to roads, bridges, and buildings.

Even before most POWs went home, new arrivals appeared in Bad Aibling – thousands of refugees from across Eastern Europe, fleeing war and persecution. Known as Displaced Persons (DPs), they were housed at the ex-airbase while awaiting hoped-for emigration to the United States and other Western countries. While some were fleeing Soviet occupation of their homelands, others had been impressed into slave labor by the Nazis and were unable or unwilling to return home. Initially cared for by the United Nations, the DPs were administered by the International

Refugee Organization (IRO) from 1947. Precisely how many DPs were housed at Bad Aibling is unknown, but the orphanage alone had 3,000 children. Although the IRO was not disbanded until 1954, its work at Bad Aibling was completed by 1951, in time for the former *Luftwaffe* airbase to greet new tenants, fresh arrivals who would stay, in one form or another, for fifty-two years.

Bad Aibling and the Cold War

Bad Aibling seemed to enchant American arrivals, beginning with the first contingent to occupy the town in May 1945. Although U.S. Army policy forbade fraternization with Germans, G.I.s wasted no time in finding ways to circumvent regulations, often making friends with Bavarians.

Any lingering antipathy from the war, on both sides, evaporated quickly. The fraternization ban was lifted by the fall of 1945, and soldiers delighted in getting to know the locals, who proved to be warm and welcoming. Before long, American troops were providing food and clothing to the citizens of the region, especially children, as Germany's immediate postwar economic situation was desperate. The American-run base helpfully employed many Germans to run facilities such as the snack bar, the barbershop, and many others, and G.I.s happily spent their free time and money at the many *Gasthäuser* in and around Bad Aibling. Thus did occupiers become friends. Soon they would be defenders too.

Once the POW camp closed in 1946, the number of American soldiers in Bad Aibling declined for a few years. Yet any hope of long-term peace in Europe dwindled in the late 1940s as Soviet behavior in occupied Eastern Europe, and particularly Eastern Germany (what would soon become the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany), proved intransigent and aggressive. The year 1948 was a turning point, with a Soviet-backed coup in



U.S. officers greet Leo Graf von Hohenenthal und Bergen (2nd from right) (1958).

Czechoslovakia and a Soviet blockade of unarmed Berlin proving the truth of Winston Churchill's statement that an "Iron Curtain" had descended

on Europe, from the Baltic to the Adriatic. This soon led to an American commitment to defend Western Europe from Communist aggression, and to the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, which the Federal Republic of Germany would join.

Kasernen all over West Germany that had once belonged to the *Wehrmacht* were hastily reopened to house troops from many NATO countries who arrived to defend free Germany and the West: British, Canadians, French, Belgians, Dutch, but most of all Americans. Bad Aibling was therefore established in 1952 as a Field Station belonging to the Army Security Agency (ASA), the organization that provided special communications support to the U.S. Army.



The Volksfest parade tunes up at the BAS front gate (1958).

In August 1952, the Army moved its first unit to Bad Aibling, the ASA's 328th Communications Reconnaissance Company. Its arrival in the town was auspicious and memorable, with the company detraining at the power plant in full battle gear and marching to the Kaserne accompanied by a Bavarian brass band in full regional regalia. The 328th had about 280 soldiers and was the sole Army unit at Bad Aibling in the early 1950s. Operationally subordinate to ASA Austria (headquartered in Salzburg), due to the proximity of the Austrian border, the 328th was essen-



View of the Station from the front gate (early 1950s)

tially a tactical outfit, possessing many trucks with mobile communications gear. The unit regularly participated in field exercises, deploying into the Bavarian and Austrian countryside as part of wargames that simulated a Soviet invasion – a prospect that in the early 1950s, with Americans fighting Communism in Korea and Stalin still in power in Moscow, seemed only too plausible.

The “BA” of the early 1950s was small and compact, with a limited antenna field; out the Kaserne’s main gate there was a single farm house with a large barn and little else between the base and the town. The area would not remain underdeveloped for long.

The year 1955 was a turning point for Bad Aibling. In May, the Kaserne was declared a permanent U.S. Army installation. At the end of July, Austria signed its State Treaty, which affirmed Austrian neutrality in exchange for the withdrawal of Allied occupation forces – Soviet, British, French, and American. The U.S. Army left Austria, and ASA Austria was no more. Most of its personnel were transferred to Bad Aibling, which sud-

denly found itself practically on the frontier of a now-neutral Austria.

The Station was resubordinated to ASA Germany, headquartered in Frankfurt, and the 328th ASA Company was replaced by the 312th ASA Battalion, which was composed largely of ex-ASA Austria personnel. Soon about 1,000 soldiers, plus some families, were at Bad Aibling, most of



Enlisted barracks, later known affectionately as “the ghost barracks” (early 1950s)

them being housed on-Station. In 1957, the 312th was deactivated and replaced by the 320th ASA Battalion.

The second half of the 1950s was a time of growth and change for the Station. Housing and mess facilities had to expand quickly to accommodate the new personnel, and the base saw a proliferation of new services, including a larger mess that was open twenty-four hours a day, followed in 1956 by an Officers' Club. Popular after-hours activities included a nine-hole golf course and other base sports, and the highly regarded Bad Aibling Chorus, which was invited to sing on AFN Radio. Establishing a local tradition, the first of many Fourth of July Fests at Bad Aibling was held in 1956 in the motor pool area, and local friends of the Station were invited to attend.

For many Station soldiers, however, there was not much free time in the late 1950s. Although Cold War tensions had diminished slightly since



The Company Street, from where it crossed the Moosbach; in the foreground is the "Club," later known as the Wildbore Hof.

Stalin's death in 1953, the threat of war remained real, and the Ops Building, a huge hangar, was busy around the clock. The Station's wartime mission was tactical, so the 320th ASA Battalion possessed many trucks and was ready to deploy to the field whenever needed. The battalion's L (or LIMA) Detachment dispatched soldiers to



Bad Aibling Station's "new" front gate, when the sign first went up (1961)

Lebanon in 1958 to support the U.S. Army and Marine deployment there. Thus, some of BA's trucks arrived in Beirut, via Frankfurt airlift and a long drive on the autobahn. The detachment's homecoming was memorable, complete with a band playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever" as the soldiers arrived at the town's Bahnhof.

The 1960s

The early 1960s saw no decrease in Cold War tensions; indeed, in Germany the opposite was true, with the Berlin Crisis of 1961 demonstrating the continuing need for a robust U.S. military presence in Europe. President John Kennedy's inaugural exhortation "to pay any price and bear any burden" in the cause of freedom rang true to Americans in uniform. For the American soldiers stationed at Bad Aibling, the mission and the threat were real.

In a few short years, the Station had grown impressively, encompassing 346 acres, including the antenna field, with forty-one permanent structures, plus three temporary ones. Base facilities included an elementary school, various hobby

shops and clubs, a bowling alley, and of course a PX and commissary. Most Station personnel and their families resided on base, though married soldiers under the rank of E-4 were required to live on the economy (it should be noted that the draftee U.S. Army of the Cold War possessed far fewer married junior enlisted soldiers than the post-Vietnam all-volunteer Army).

Off-hours activities at BA for young soldiers were abundant. The many local *Gasthäuser* beckoned with their excellent Bavarian food and beer at prices – with more than four marks to the dollar – that even the most junior G.I. could afford. Boating on the Chiemsee, skiing in the Alps, visiting nearby castles and churches – for soldiers with free time, there was an embarrassment of riches. Every Saturday night featured an on-base dance, an excellent draw for Americans and Germans alike; this was one of the many ways the Station fostered good relations with the local population. Likewise, the Station hosted a meeting every second month at the Officers' Club to sort out any misunderstandings between soldiers and the local population.



*"The Club"
from the
Company
Street (1961)*

The Station also established *The Bavarian Observer*, which was billed as the “first weekly ASA newspaper in the world,” a source of valued information on local activities, sporting events, and features of interest both on base and in the Bad Aibling area. The distinctive “spirit of BA,” well known to all those, military or civilian, fortunate enough to have served a tour at the Station, was firmly entrenched by the mid-1960s, and made BA a special place to be. While mission always came first, the Station enjoyed an exceptional reputation not merely for its extracurricular delights, but for its can-do attitude, its esprit de corps, and its outstanding relations with the local population.

A typical story was the BA Volunteer Fire Department, which was founded in the late 1960s. Starting with minimal equipment or experience but an abundance of ardor, the Station’s enthusiastic volunteers worked so hard that they won the annual U.S. Army Europe Firefighters’ Competition the year they were formed. This success led to excellent professional and personal relations with local German firefighters – which resulted, inevitably, in BA’s first Firemen’s Fest.

In *Oberbayern* it was easier than most places to forget that the late 1960s were a period of turmoil and change for the Army and the nation. Cold War tensions remained high, with the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, very close to Bad Aibling, producing a NATO crisis, and the war in Vietnam causing dissent at home and high casualties for the U.S. military. The draftee Army could not be separated from the troubles at home, and although Bad Aibling experienced few morale problems, the broader political difficulties confronting the military and the nation were known to all.

There were other changes occurring in the late 1960s, ones that would directly affect the Station. In June 1966 the 320th ASA Battalion was deactivated, and Bad Aibling was redesignated the 18th ASA Field Station. In December 1967, there would



Army Chief of Staff General Harold Johnson visiting BAS (1960s)

be another name alteration, to simply ASA Field Station Bad Aibling. While these were essentially paper changes, there were more significant developments coming. Since its establishment, the Station had been an Army base. Members of the other armed services and Department of Defense (DoD) civilians were rarely seen, except as visitors. This began to change in the late 1960s, however. DoD civilians were required to provide technical expertise and leadership in support of the Station’s mission. The change was not dramatic – the number of civilians was small at first, and many of the personnel had previously served in the U.S. military, but it presaged a different Station on the horizon.

The 1970s and 1980s

The U.S. Army of the early 1970s was in flux. There was not just a drawdown worldwide due to the withdrawal from Vietnam, but the decline of the draft, down to its termination in 1973, meant that the Army would have to function with fewer troops. This new reality began to be felt at Bad Aibling. Soldiers returning home from a tour were not replaced, and Station personnel declined notably in 1970-71. “Closure syndrome” descended



Bad Aibling Station, early 1970s

on BA – not for the last time – and many jobs, including gate guards and firemen, were taken over by German civilians.

ASA Field Station Bad Aibling was officially discontinued on June 30, 1972, its mission being consolidated with ASA Field Station Augsburg. The Army era at Bad Aibling was ended – for now – and DoD took over the base. The Chief of Station and most senior positions were now held by DoD personnel, though uniforms were still commonly seen on base. Many Army personnel remained at the Station, and the other services – Air Force, Navy, and Marines – were represented too, for the first time.

New personnel quickly adopted the Station's ways and traditions, and soon added many of their own. Newcomers, civilian and military, developed an affection for BA as deep as that of the soldiers who built the Station in the early years.

Among the first established, and most popular, of the new traditions was the Fourth of July Fest. First feted in 1956, this did not carry on under Army tutelage, but was revived by DoD civilians in 1974, at the suggestion of the Chief of Station. The event was open to the public and offered beer, snacks, and entertainment; from the start it was a huge hit with Germans and Americans alike.

Through the 1970s the Fest expanded to meet popular demand, adding bands, dancers, and contests to appeal to all ages. The Fourth of July Fest soon became a meeting place for Americans and Germans to share their cultures and traditions in an irresistibly fun fashion that was quintessentially "BA."

The American bicentennial in 1976 brought special celebrations to the Fourth of July Fest including the addition of a midway and a collection of state flags, both of which would become a permanent part of the tradition. The Station's Fourth of July Fest soon became famous not just among Americans serving in Germany, but among Bavarians too; the locals considered the event the best Fest in the region, a high compliment indeed.

For Americans eager to get to know Germans, the opportunities for cross-cultural learning, and fun, were limitless. German-American cooperation took many amusing forms. One local tradition that Americans found delightful was the "theft" of the Station's maypole. BA added its own maypole, like any other Bavarian locale; it was a gift from the Countess of Maxlrain. But in 1981, Franz Jonas, a German who worked at the Station, "con-



*4th of
July
parades*

spired” with over twenty Germans and eight Americans to make off with the maypole. Herr Jonas and his co-conspirators took the maypole from the motor pool, where it was being housed, and made off with it. Negotiations followed between the Chief of Station and the “kidnappers” and once the ransom was paid – fifty liters of beer – the maypole was returned and another Station tradition was born.

Bad Aibling’s gift for blending American and Bavarian ways and customs was one of the many things that made it a special place to serve. In a typical case, the Station was able to make the Mardi Gras celebration, *Fasching* to the locals, even more entertaining when some Americans at the Station who were from New Orleans added their traditions, resulting in an international mélange that delighted all attendees and would have made Bourbon Street proud.

By the mid-1980s, it was evident that the Station was not going to close imminently, despite



Winter

many warnings and rumors to the contrary. As a result, overdue improvements to Station facilities were undertaken in the late 1980s, including the renovation of the Ops building, the heating plant, the post office/PX/auto hobby shop complex, the barracks, the chapel, the MP building, the Community Club, the visitors’ quarters, and senior NCO bachelor quarters, and the commissary.



It wasn’t all work (early 1980s).



“Alphorns” – July 2002

The end of the decade saw the unexpected and dramatic collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and soon the Soviet Union itself. The popular revolt that began in the summer of 1989 in Soviet satellite states within two years spread to the USSR. The Cold War ended suddenly and peacefully, bringing huge changes for Europe, NATO, and U.S. military bases, Bad Aibling included.

There was joy among Germans, and Americans, that the Cold War had been won without fighting in Europe. For Germans, the peaceful collapse of East Germany and the national reunification that resulted brought happiness and the healing of the last wounds of the Second World War. An American serving at the Station who was fortunate to attend an Oktoberfest that coincided with the first “German Unity Day” in October 1990, found himself feted by the locals, who were grateful for American help in defending German freedom over the decades. The Oktoberfest band, learning Americans were present, played “The Star Spangled Banner,” “America the Beautiful,” and other patriotic tunes to honor their guests, leaving them deeply moved by such a display of gratitude.



Updated station logo, 2000

The Final Decade

In 1994, as part of the post-Cold War draw-down of U.S. forces and DoD facilities in Europe, DoD relinquished command of Bad Aibling Station to the U.S. Army. The usual rumors of closure were in the air again, but it would not happen, at least not yet. Instead the Station reverted to military ownership. The Army Security Agency was no more – a 1977 Army reorganization amalgamated ASA with Military Intelligence, establishing the Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM) – and INSCOM was the base’s new proprietor. In its final decade, BA was run by the Army and staffed with personnel from all the armed forces as well as DoD civilians.

While Station strength gradually declined, the mission remained robust due to rising instability in Europe. The operational culture of innovation in which BA personnel took pride served the Station well throughout its final decade.

The end of the Cold War brought not the lasting peace that was expected, but rather disorder, war, and genocide in the Balkans. The collapse of Yugoslavia beginning in 1991 brought fighting to Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosovo, resulting in major diplomatic and military



Bad Aibling Station, September 1999

commitments by the U.S. and NATO. For the U.S. European Command (EUCOM), the 1990s proved an unexpectedly busy decade, and Bad Aibling supported U.S. and Allied peacekeeping and peacemaking operations in the Balkans.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States began America's Global War on Terrorism. For Station personnel, the 9/11 catastrophe served as a poignant reminder of the deep connections between Americans and Germans. Those serving at the base were touched and surprised by the outpouring of grief and support by average Germans, the people of Bad Aibling who had come to see themselves as related to the *Amis*, not by blood but by more than fifty years of working together in the cause of freedom. America's loss and pain were theirs.

The Station's main gate was closed after 9/11 for security reasons, and locals fashioned a makeshift memorial there, with huge floral bouquets, and a can-

dlelight vigil too; the base was inundated with cards, letters, and gifts from Germans expressing their sadness at America's loss. A local house simply hung a banner stating "God Bless America." At a practical level, Bad Aibling local authorities immediately responded with additional security for the Station, without even an American request for assistance. No one at Bad Aibling after 9/11 would ever forget such expressions of sympathy and support.



Front gate – Summer 2003



September 12, 2001: spontaneous expressions of sympathy

Down to its closure in 2004, an ending that had been predicted imminently since the opening of Field Station Bad Aibling fifty-two years earlier, BA would remain on duty, providing valuable around-the-clock support to the United States and its allies, in Europe and around the world, against diverse threats to international peace and security. Its mission is moving to other DoD installations, and the Station will be no more. But its unique spirit – of cheerful effectiveness, of devotion to duty, of operational flexibility, of collaboration between organizations and peoples, a rare international partnership – will live on in the thousands of Americans and Germans who made BA such a treasured place to serve, creating a special place in the history of U.S. and Allied security. As one who counted

himself lucky to have spent five years at the Station remembered, “If you couldn’t make friends in Bad Aibling, you weren’t trying.”



Change of command, July 2002

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50-year anniversary logo

BAS Christmas trees, following the community tree lighting ceremony, December 2000



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Other photos from the early 1950s through 1960s courtesy of Mr. Bill Lenhart, Mr. Ken Eddy, and the many BAS Alumni who returned to visit us and reminisce through the years. Thank you for your wonderful pictures, stories, and anecdotes about the early years at Bad Aibling Station.



Loyalty Above All!